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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0029  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0075  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0100  
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SUBJECT: UPPER ASSAM 'LIKE A BATTLEFIELD' AS INDIAN SECURITY FORCES  
RESUME FIGHTING ULFA

REF: CALCUTTA 0362

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 24, the GOI resumed its operations against the Assam-based United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). This resumption of hostilities came forty-one days after the Indian military unilaterally suspended its operations against ULFA. Though the GOI is calling the breakdown in the peace process a "temporary setback," the Indian Army and ULFA have escalated their operation in Assam. The GOI blames the present impasse on ULFA's reluctance to commit in writing to a ceasefire, unabated extortions, and growing belligerence. Since the resumption of military activities, Assam has been wracked by a series of ULFA attacks and security incidents. One local paper wrote Upper Assam has become "like a battlefield." As casualties mount, a quick end to this latest round of violence is unlikely. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On September 24, forty-one days after unilaterally announcing suspension of operations against ULFA, the GOI called off the suspension, citing gross violation of an informal understanding. Subsequently, the ULFA's representative People's Consultative Group (PCG) also pulled out of the peace discussions. On October 17, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil said that the Center was keen to continue the peace process, and claimed that in keeping with the suggestion of the Assam Government, the Center was willing to release five ULFA militant leaders. Patil described the breakdown in the peace process as a temporary setback, reiterating that GOI was ready for dialogue with ULFA if it shunned violence. ULFA has not offered any date for direct talks nor has it ceased its violent activities..

¶3. (U) The GOI's decision to resume security operations came after reports of massive extortion by ULFA during the ceasefire period and the killing of a policeman and a tea garden manager in upper Assam between September 22-23. Assam Police Intelligence Chief Khagen Sharma told post that the members of the Unified Command in Assam, the Army, the paramilitary and the police were conducting operations against ULFA. He said there are daily incidents of violence and also a number of surrenders of ULFA members. Sharma said that operations have been launched all over the state as security efforts in just a few selected areas would enable ULFA members to shift to other districts.

¶4. (U) Since the resumption of security operations in Assam, the state has been wracked by persistent violence. According to

the Assamese newspaper "Aji," Upper Assam has "become like a battlefield." A few examples of recent incidents include:

-- On September 29, eight people were injured when a bomb exploded outside the TDA supermarket in Tinsukia.

-- On October 1, in Dhemaji, ULFA killed a ten year old boy.

-- On October 3, two ULFA men riding a motorcycle were halted by the traffic police on regular checking at Lakhimpur. One man pointed a pistol at the policeman. As an alarm was raised, the other man sped off leaving his companion behind. The gun-toting man was chased by the police for a kilometer. Shots were exchanged and the ULFA member died. An Italian made 7.65 pistol with 16 rounds of live ammunition were recovered in his possession. In another incident, a powerful bomb went off in front of a hotel on the Chawul Dhowa Road near the deputy commissioner's office just ten hours after the earlier killing of the ULFA terrorist.

-- On October 6, a suspected ULFA militant was killed in an encounter with the troops of the Army's Red Horn Division at Jartaluk village near Dhamdhama in Nalbari district. The Army recovered a revolver, a hand grenade, two live cartridges, two fired cartridges and some blank extortion letters from his possession. The militant had been taking shelter in the village when the Army, acting on a tip-off, cordoned off the area. The militant then fired at the Army, to which the Army retaliated, resulting in his death.

-- On October 7, the ULFA triggered an IED blast under an Army truck near Mahmora in Sivasagar district, in which three Army personnel were injured and the vehicle damaged. Police said that the incident was in retaliation for the killing of a hardcore ULFA member, Debojit Konwar, at Borhat in the same district on

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October 6. In another incident in upper Assam, a grenade was hurled in the Tengakhat police station in Dibrugarh, but no one was injured.

-- On October 8, two motorcycle-riding suspected ULFA members shot dead Ajay Medhi, an ULFA member who had surrendered to authorities, at a village on the outskirts of Sarthebari town. Suspected ULFA militants reportedly threw grenades in front of the Amguri police station in Sivasagar district.

-- On October 9, one ULFA militant was detained while the other managed to flee after they lobbed a grenade near a market in Digboi.

-- On October 15, suspected ULFA militants shot dead a businessman, Om Prakash Agarwala, at his shop at Moran Singrijan. The two militants, who came on a motorcycle, shot Agarwala after he had opened the shop door. Four AK-56 cartridges were later recovered from the spot. Three days back, the militants had served Agarwala with an extortion notice of for around USD \$25,000.

-- On October 15, the body of an ULFA militant was found at KK Handique Nagar, Kahilipara under Dispur Police Station. Police said the militant, identified as Gautom Kalita of Rangiya, was carrying an explosive with him when it went off accidentally, killing him on the spot. Police said that the militant was in the city to carry out subversive activities.

15. (SBU) Comment: Given the scope of the GOI's response to the breakdown of talks, it is clear that Army leadership has asked for and received greater latitude in responding to ULFA terrorism. However, during the cease-fire period, ULFA used the relative peace to regroup and strengthen. The militant group can be expected to continue small-scale bombing and shooting attacks to target key infrastructure and security officials. ULFA will also hope that if the security forces respond in a heavy-handed manner, the group will garner additional sympathy within the local populace. Persistent violence can be expected

in Assam for at least the next few months, until ULFA is weakened enough to again seek some negotiated settlement with the GOI.  
JARDINE